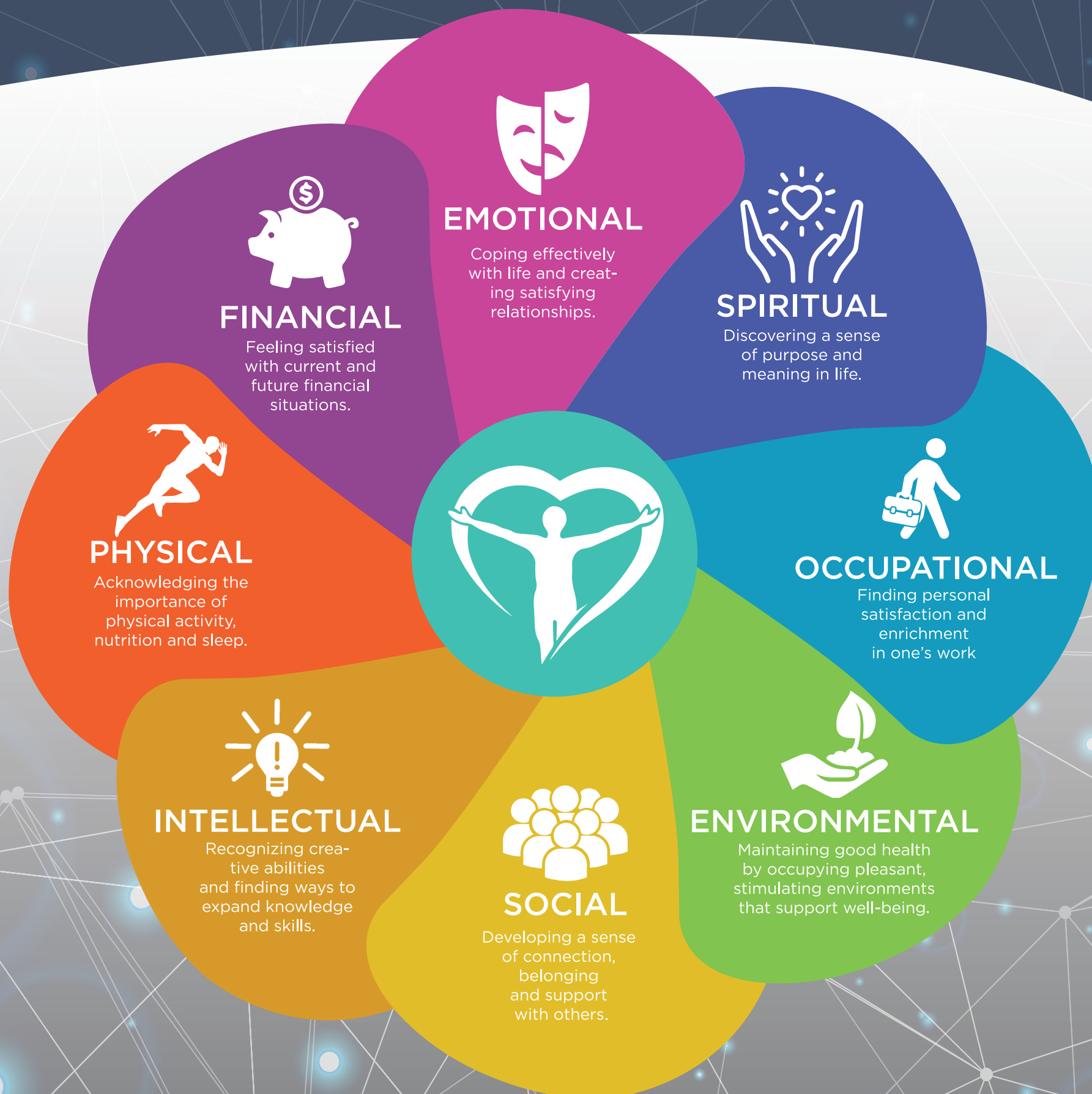


8 DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS

GETTING THROUGH A TOUGH TIME



8 dimensions of wellness to get through the pandemic

By BEA CABRERA
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CORRESPONDENT

As depicted by the 8 Dimensions of Wellness: Physical, Emotional, Social, Environmental, Occupational, Financial, Spiritual and Intellectual Wellness, human wellness has to be approached in a holistic way. It is encouraged that incorporating these dimensions in a way that is applicable and effective in your life can help us overcome many challenges, including the COVID19 pandemic.

While it is surely easier said than done, here are some things to remember:

1 Physical Wellness is achievable in our island paradise. We are surrounded by mountains, beaches and a three-kilometer jogging path along Beach Road that are all accessible. Malyn Vergara Ronquillo and her friends explore the mountains at least three times a week and are always awed by the sights they see. Yoga instructor Kerri Bauer sees the benefits of holding yoga classes by the beach. Aside from the fresh air, the sights and sound of the ocean crashing on the shore adds to the calm and peace that yoga brings.

2 An advocate of women empowerment and mental health, Asia Hilario, who is now based in San Francisco, California, makes her voice heard by sharing advice on how the CNMI community can find **Emotional Wellness** amid the pandemic. She said that losing control and freedom due to the pandemic is not forever and that you have the power to have a sense of normalcy within yourself.

3 Volunteer work helps Saipan Cares for Animals president Beth Pliscou extend love and care to animals. She said her reward is the love and care that she immediately gets back from the dogs and cats she rescues and nurture. Being aware of what the community members needs beef up your **Social Wellness**.

4 Aside from baking, growing your own indoor garden is a hobby that many picked up during quarantine. Kiara's

Garden owner Dhez Javier said that more people got into plants and the pandemic changed how many people view gardening or collecting ornamental plants at home. People realized that it is not so hard to take care of plants as it is good for the soul and promotes **Environmental Wellness**.

5 The pandemic created a climate of economic grim, which is the reason for many business closures and unemployment. The CNMI is one of the beneficiaries of loans and assistance coming from the federal government, making sure that with or without a job, **Occu-**

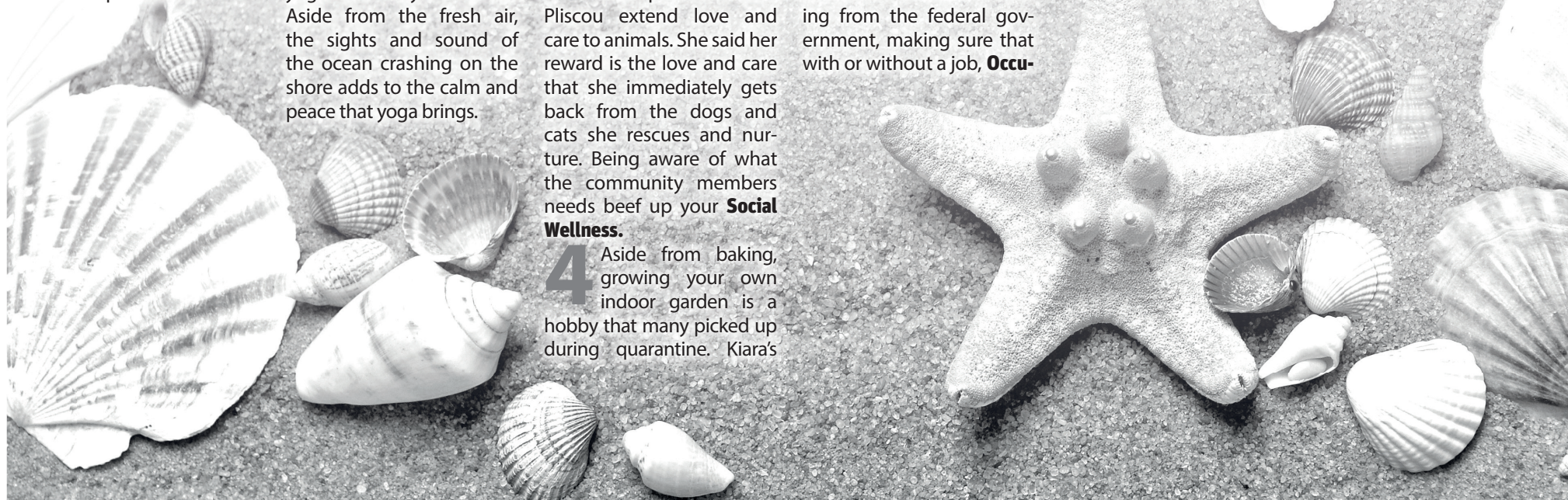
pational Wellness is a priority so people can go on with their lives.

6 People find ways to make and save money during this trying times. It can mean holding two jobs or letting go of luxuries that they are used to and transitioning to just the necessities to maintain a status of **Financial Wellness** through the pandemic.

7 Bishop Ryan Jimenez reminds people that despite of the all the

challenges and uncertainties, loving and helping others enrich one's **Spiritual Wellness**.

8 Bored with being confined to the four corners of your room? Lindsay Nash, head of the Saipan Book Club, encourages you to pick up a book. Doesn't matter if you have read it before or not. Let it surprise you with new knowledge and imagination to maintain **Intellectual Wellness**.



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Physical wellness must still be prioritized

By BEA CABRERA
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CORRESPONDENT

We may have to live through this pandemic for many months but that doesn't mean we also have to be in stasis. We can make good choices along the way like taking care of our physical wellness. Studies show that physical activity and any form of exercise have long-term benefits on health, nutrition, sleep, and effective ways to treat stress, depression and anxiety. Physical wellness is something that

you can control, especially during this pandemic, and it is within your control as you can do it in your own home or outside.

Commitment and consistency in physical wellness goes well with peer support and this is what pushes friends Malyn Vergara-Ronquillo, Michelle Z., and Joseph Chin to go all around Saipan on hikes and climbs.

"If you are a morning person, adventurous, loves nature, and in need of physical fitness, join our hikes. We are a diverse group of people who enjoy each other's company and develop friendship

that lasts for a very long time. ...We have been doing this long before COVID, but the pandemic gave us more reason to go out there and explore," said Vergara-Ronquillo.

"...We are not afraid to go out to explore the mountains and beaches because, one, we do not have community spread and, second, we are out in the jungle exploring, exercising, and enjoying each other's company and these are the things I love about our time together," she added.

Vergara-Ronquillo said that

they used to hike only in popular places. "We frequented Forbidden Island and Bird Island pre-COVID but the places that we have been for the last five months have been like new journeys and we discovered that there more places to go on island. ...Due to the pandemic we all have these stresses and you have the urge to do things and go to other places but can't, so going hiking gives me peace of mind. We do a lot of laughing along the trail and we get our cardio workout done at

the same time."

She said the group usually just follow ribbons in places that people have already tagged or "sometimes we follow a different route and kind of make our own trail." At one point, they even christened a certain rock formation "Windows" because "when we took pictures, the rock formation looked like windows."

She assured that the group goes prepared, sometimes bringing their own rope for safety and there is internal communication in the group

about the things that need to be brought during a hike.

Michelle Z., who has been living on Saipan for 25 years, has found new love for the island every time they discover a new hiking trail and breathtaking landscape. "I have been here almost half of my life and I didn't even know these places existed until we started this hike group. ...Saipan is the best, is very beautiful, and seeing different sights make me love it more," she said.

See **PHYSICAL** on Next Page



"Friendship and getting our cardio workout in are what we enjoy about exploring the island," said hike and climb enthusiast Malyn Vergara-Ronquillo. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

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Guard your emotional wellness during the pandemic

By BEA CABRERA
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CORRESPONDENT

Since January, news of the COVID-19 outbreak has not only been flooding our TV screens, social media, and newspapers but also in the way we live our lives. With over 200,000 deaths in the U.S. mainland and over a million worldwide, this pandemic has been huge test for everyone in terms of managing emotions. The feeling of uncertainty, anxiety and panic during this time can still be managed, though.

Saipan-born Asia Hilario, who is a crisis counselor for CrisisTextLine in San Francisco, California, said that emotional instability comes

from the emotional pain of grief. Citing a Harvard study she recently read, Hilario said it spoke about grief and the five stages relating to the pandemic, that grief doesn't just come in the form of losing someone. It also comes in the form of losing normalcy—losing our routines, losing our freedom to go outside and to go certain places to travel, etc., and even losing a sense of safety.

"I talked about this in a recent podcast interview that not a lot of people would have considered 'grief' as the emotion they were feeling, especially ones that were fortunate enough not to lose anyone to COVID," she said.

The five stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. And most people's reaction to the pandemic mirrors those five stages. "Of course it is advised that we should take our time in every stage of grief, but acceptance is where more inner peace will be found—accepting that this is the norm now and creating new routines to fit this norm," she added.

According to Hilario, there are ways to battle grief and the feeling of uncertainty and these help deal with these

emotions. "Find balance in the things you're thinking. If you feel the worst image taking shape, make yourself think of the best image. Make yourself come into the



Hilario

present as much as you can. Since we cannot predict the future and we stress focusing on the past and what could have been, we must make it a habit to actively live in the present and we can do this by meditating and practicing mindfulness."

"We should let go of what we can't control. What your neighbor is doing is out of

your control. What is in your control is staying six feet away from them and washing your hands. Focus on what we can control. Lastly, stock up on compassion—be kind, help one another out and spread encouragement and positivity at any opportunity because there's a high probability it will be multiplied," she said.

Hilario also said that there is power in naming your emotions. "When you name an emotion, it helps you feel what's inside of you. When you name your emotions, you acknowledge them and they can move through you. Trying to fight our feelings often leads to more suffering, so we have to acknowledge them, then feel them, then gently let them go. There's no way around pain but through it," she said.

Hilario cited Jennifer Rollin in her article "3 Reasons to Let Yourself Feel Your Emotions," which states that hurt, frustration, pain, sadness, and anger are all natural and healthy parts of the human experience "so when we try to suppress

these emotions, we are unable to thrive and feel other emotions like joy, happiness, etc. Part of having a full life is feeling all of your emotions, both pleasant and unpleasant," she added.

To keep and maintain a strong heart and mind, Hilario urged people to practice gratitude every single day. "I write down three things I'm grateful for in a journal every single day and there are many benefits of writing in a gratitude journal—it lower stress levels, you feel calm at night and you gain a new perspective of what is important to you and what you truly appreciate in your life," she said. "By noting what you are grateful for, you will gain clarity of what you want to have more of in your life, and what you can cut from your life and helps you focus on what really matters."

Hilario advocates for women empowerment, mental health, and wellness and was named "Woman of the Year" in 2019 by an organization called "Women on the Rise."

PHYSICAL

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"It's funny because whenever I post a photo, friends would immediately send me messages asking, 'Where are you?' 'Is this on Saipan?' and I simply tell them yes. ... Being a businesswoman, my stress level is really high so when I go on a hike, it is a good time to destress, sweat, good cardio and overall a big help for me," she added.

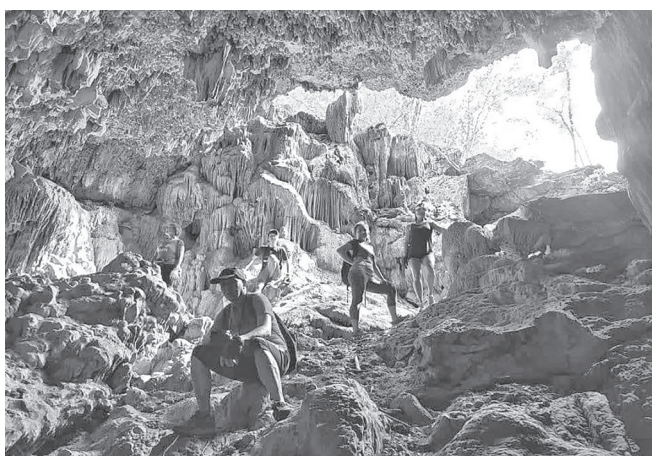
The worldwide pandemic outbreak in March got Joseph Chin stuck on Saipan. The company he works for temporarily ceased operations and, being from Malaysia, he doesn't have a lot of friends on Saipan. "I met Malyn and the group and they took me in to join their hikes and climbs. ... I was scared during the first hike, then we did it more and I finally got the hang of it. We go to the jungle, we explore, and

go in blindly. The best part is when we reach the end and this beautiful scenery opens up to you. I have nothing but awe for the beauty of nature," he said.

"Since most of my friends from work have left the island already, if I hadn't found this group, I imagine I will just be in my apartment this whole time and that would be sad. Being with this group, we only have positive vibes for each other and that makes me comfortable and that helps me to feel okay, even away from my home country during the pandemic," he said.

Derek Cutting, who owns Latte Built-24 Hour Fitness and Nutrition, said that physical wellness plays into so much more than just anyone's "looks."

"Working out and exercising naturally releases dopamine in our brains—the 'feel good' hormone. This is important for everyone's



"We usually just follow ribbons in places that people already tagged or sometimes we follow a different route and kind of make our own trail," said hike and climb enthusiast Malyn Vergara-Ronquillo

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

wellness, especially for some who may be battling some depression. Secondly, eating nutritious, dense foods keep our immune system strong and able to fight off many foreign germs, diseases, and viruses like COVID-19," he said.

Latte Built has already reopened both its locations on Saipan in early June. "At first we had to keep our hours

restricted due to the government mandates but since we are in a 'Blue' phase now, we are back to 24/7 access for all members," he added.

Latte Built has a couple of health programs: The Barbell Club, which is like a Crossfit type of class conducted by CF Level1 certified Joey Tudela every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 5:30pm, and "Class and a Glass" that puts together yoga exercise and drinking wine in one event that started in September.

Last Friday, yoga instructor Kerri Bauer held the second "Class and a Glass" at the beach near Surf Club in Chalan Kanoa. The next class is on Nov. 19, from 5pm to 6pm. We have an earlier time to accommodate the sunset. ... The cost is \$8 for Latte Built members and \$15 for non-members. The price includes your class and your wine. ... The class is about a sense of community and bringing together a group of people who want to spend an evening together for a yoga class followed by a glass of wine," she said.

"Yoga is a restorative and emotional exercise. We are combining the movement of yoga with the breezy and free feeling of sunset at the beach along with a glass of wine. It's a workout class with a built-in happy hour alongside people you already have things in common with," she added.

Bauer said that teaching yoga and getting people into it, especially at the time of a pandemic is advantageous. "Yoga has been established

as a means to boost immunity, improve overall health and wellbeing. Lack of proper sleep, poor nutrition, and leading a stressful life all lead to a weakened immune system and vulnerability to sickness. ... By having the yoga class by the beach, we can adhere to COVID-19 guidelines, enjoy fresh air, and watch the sunset, which has a calming and meditative affect that applies to our meditative yoga," she said.

"During this time, stay active, dedicate time each day to moving your body. If you can't get to a gym, take a walk, hike, or swim. Make sure you get enough sleep. Not getting enough sleep can weaken your immune system. Make it a habit to try to eat more whole nutritious foods instead of processed snacks or fast food. Cope with stressful feelings by using positive coping mechanisms like exercise, meditation, reading, further developing certain skills or hobbies etc. and, most importantly, stay connected with your loved ones," she added.



"Saipan is very beautiful and seeing different sights makes me love it more," said hike and climb enthusiast Michelle Z.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



"The class is about a sense of community and bringing together a group of like-minded people," said Latte Built yoga instructor Kerri Bauer.

DEREK CUTTING

Social awareness makes you see what the community needs



BEA CABRERA
From left, Saipan Cares for Animals volunteer Mariana Castro, SCA president Beth Pliscou, Dr. Yumi, and volunteer Amber Liwag

By BEA CABRERA
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CORRESPONDENT

After 10 months of dealing with the pandemic, we all know the drill when we step out of the house—wear a mask, practice social distancing, observe proper hygiene—because the more you are socially aware, the more you protect yourself and others from getting the virus.

But being socially aware also means recognizing our social obligations by giving our time, effort and skills to a sector in the community that needs it the most.

Pandemic and no pandemic, the work of rescuing stray dogs and cats on the streets or abandoned in parks, jungles, and beaches does not stop for Saipan Cares for Animals president Beth Pliscou. Since 2012, Pliscou has been doing voluntary work rescuing homeless, injured, and deceased animals that she encounter along the way.

"I see such sadness with homeless animals everywhere on island. ...Saipan Cares for Animals is a dedicated group of volunteers whose mission is to improve the life of every animal on Saipan through sterilization, medication, and socialization. We do this by helping the animals directly and offering the community low-cost pet care services," Pliscou said.

"During this time, we have seen more people step up. Before, when people would rescue a kitten or a cat or dog or a puppy, they would pick them up, and bring it to us. Now, since many are home and they have the time, most



BEA CABRERA
SCA president Beth Pliscou has been caring for stray and abandoned dogs and cats since she moved to Saipan in 2012.

of them say, 'I found this dog on the road and I'm going to take care of it and how will you help me?' That has been a great relief for us. ...It's great to see the community stepping up, helping, and taking responsibility about this problem on Saipan," she said.

SCA is currently being ran and supported by other volunteers who want to help and make a difference in other people and animals' lives. Right now, many of SCA's volunteers are either high school students or college students because they are not physically going to school. "We also have adults who are keeping a schedule and these volunteers help a lot in getting animals comfortable socializing with humans because this helps with our adoption," Pliscou said.

"Volunteer work pays nothing but you feel good just by doing this work and what you get back is just tremendous. ...I get paid by all the animals' love and devotion,"

Pliscou added.

Amber Liwag from Koblerville started volunteer work at SCA in July and her experience in taking care of her dog helped her a lot. "I brought in my dog because it she was really sick. ...Beth saw that I was good with that, especially when my dog was having seizures. She asked me if I wanted to volunteer and I said yes," she said.

"It has been really cool because I love helping animals. I wanted to be a nurse but now I am thinking of getting into veterinary medicine because of the time here. ...It makes you feel good even just cleaning for them. It's like you get to give them a good place to stay. Some animals might get adopted and some may stay here their whole lives but it's nice to know that you are helping to make them live comfortably, which gives me some pride in my work," she added.

Amber's friend, Mariana Castro, was inspired by the

work done at SCA that she also volunteered at the clinic. "...I feel like Saipan Cares doesn't get a lot of acknowledgment as they should because the little things they do actually means the most. People see us as just a clinic but they don't understand how much we need to do and how much we actually do. Like Amber, my time here widened my perspective and interest in veterinary medicine," she said.

They currently have many dogs and cats that are up for adoption at the clinic and if you feel isolated during this

time, adoption might be a good option for you. "You get unconditional love from animals and you get it back immediately. You don't get that from humans, especially if you are isolated during the pandemic, so a cat or a dog can really help you have that connection. The gratitude and love they give you really helps you feel good," Pliscou said.

"If you rescue a dog or a cat that had a bad time and bad life before, they are very grateful because they know how bad it was and you would get devotion that you wouldn't

get otherwise. ...Aside from companionship, an animal, especially a dog, gets you out of the house too. A dog has to go out for a walk. You don't often do that for yourself but you will do that for a dog. That kind of pushes to you to get into a routine to get up in the morning or a lot time in the evening, if not for yourself you will do that for another," she added.

If you'd like to volunteer, you can contact SCA on the website, Facebook fan page, or call Pliscou at (670) 285-5448.

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Living a sustainable lifestyle during the pandemic

By BEA CABRERA
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CORRESPONDENT

These days, you either bake, do gardening, plant small

crops, read the growing pile of new unread books, or learn how to crochet.

With the lockdowns and quarantines, people have

been forced to stay put and slow down but that hasn't stopped many from being productive and it may have pushed many to go the extra mile to pick up new habits and skills.

Many have become green thumbs, while others realize they have so much junk at home and go the other way by decluttering—keeping what is important and doing away with what's not. Still others learn to manage their own trash and switch to a sustainable lifestyle that makes for a good foundation for environmental wellness.

Dhez Javier, who owns Kiara's Garden in Kobleville, has seen an influx of customers buying outdoor and indoor plants in the last few months, particularly when curfews were still in place and people had limited time to go out. "One thing that we can all agree on is that COVID-19 and its downstream impact on our lives has everyone stressed out and anxious. Gardening distracts the mind from the causes of stress and provides something else to focus on. During the pandemic, we have to stay home most of the time but it doesn't mean that you have to stay indoors. We



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

"Recycling is not expensive. These trash bins cost \$20 apiece. That's \$60 and a worthwhile expense for the environment," said Matt Castro.

can go outside and do gardening," she said.

Javier said that working with the soil and the bounty of nature is enriching and connects people to nature. "Aside from giving us something to do, it is mentally therapeutic. ...Scientists have published findings that working with soil is beneficial to one's health and happiness. Soil bacterium, mycobacterium vaccae, are microscopic

bacteria that enters your system when you touch the soil. They generate serotonin and dopamine, which are both chemicals that produce a feeling of happiness," she added.

Ella Songsong of Garapan got into collecting ornamental plants three months ago. "I have been working from home since June and it came to a point when I said to myself, 'Something is missing in my space.' I thought maybe I

just need color so I decided to bring in a plant that has been sitting in my garage. It looked nice and I thought, 'What If I add some more?' A few weeks later, my computer and I were surrounded by succulents, tropical plants, and ferns that I had repotted," she said.

"Being surrounded by plants is good visually and the feeling that they are healthy gives me happiness because

See PANDEMIC on Next Page



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"Gardening keeps us busy and is mentally therapeutic," said Dhez Javier of Kiara's Garden.

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PANDEMIC

From Page 14

I used my own hands to grow them. When my eyes are tired or I just need to relax after a long Zoom meeting, I look around me and see lots of green and an instant feeling of relaxation kicks in," she said.

Jen Cortez of Capital Hill was furloughed in April and she was doing fine at home in the months when she was out of work, until one day, she felt her room was getting tight. "I woke up one day and looked around my room and thought, 'Why does my room feel small and tight?' Clothes were sticking out of my cabinet, several shoes and zoris were behind the door, and a pile of laundry was waiting on the couch," she said.

"I realized I needed to declutter and regain my space, so I did that in one day from morning until about 5pm. I threw many things that I don't use anymore or did not know I had. I have clothes and shoes that I was able to donate and finally got to use my couch, not for piling laundry but really for sitting. I'm back at work and I still keep a decluttered space and I keep my things organized," she added.

Working on things in his garage every Saturday, Matt Castro of San Vicente regularly sees a garbage truck pick



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

"Being surrounded by plants is good visually," said Ella Songsong.

up their trash from the bin. "At around 1:30pm to 2pm the garbage truck is sure to come. They did not stop or falter even during the strictest lockdown we've had on island and these men work hard, going around the island to collect garbage. This made me think, 'How can I make it easier for these guys and still keep our surroundings clean?'" he said.

"Recycling was what en-

tered my mind. So I bought trash containers and labeled each one with cans, plastic, and bottles. Now we have trash that goes to the bin that the garbage truck collects and trash from the containers that I bring to Lower Base. It is not a lot and I wish I picked up this habit a long time ago. This is good for the community and especially for the environment," he added.

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By BEA CABRERA

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CORRESPONDENT

When the pandemic hit, unemployment and business closures skyrocketed. The U.S. government rode to the rescue of not just the U.S. mainland but also the CNMI and other territories with a raft of financial assistance to businesses and individuals to keep the economy moving and help people go on with their lives.

Eligible individuals and businesses were able to receive stimulus checks, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, and Federal Pandemic Compensation, while the Paycheck Protection Program and Small Business Administration loans were activated.

A total of \$54.7 million worth of the economic impact payments or stimulus checks were issued and released by the CNMI Department of Finance. A stimulus check was meant to provide taxpayers with spending power and, at the same time, boost economic movement.

Melanie Campos of Garapan said that the first round of stimulus checks helped her and her family reorganize themselves after she and husband were laid off from work. "My husband and I work simple jobs and classified as low-income workers. When we were laid off, we were shocked and disheartened and, just right on time, two weeks later our stimulus checks arrived," she said.

"We received \$2,400 in total and this kept us afloat for a time while we were trying to reorganize our-



OCCUPATIONAL WELLNESS during the PANDEMIC

selves, our children, our savings and our daily budget. The money from the stimulus checks helped us not to dig into our savings immediately, that's why it was a huge help for my family," she added.

In May, the U.S. Department of

Labor approved the CNMI's implementation plan for the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation programs. The CNMI Department of Labor then distributed up to \$136 million worth of Pan-

demic Unemployment Assistance and Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.

Lisa Garcia of Papago said that being furloughed turned her life upside-down. "Being without a job

affected me immensely but receiving PUA helped me stay on top of my bills. Without it, I would've lost my car and probably run out of food," she said.

"The government's decision to provide relief and support could really help businesses and the community to live their lives as normally as possible in times like these," she added.

In April, the U.S. Small Business Administration approved over \$513 billion worth of loans under its Paycheck Protection Program. A total of 336 applicants are from the Northern Marianas amounting to a total of \$34,902,412. SBA's Paycheck Protection Program helps small businesses that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, so that they could avoid laying off employees.

John Michaels of Chalan Kiya, who owns a small plumbing business, said that receiving this kind of relief was a big help. "It allowed me to still open shop and keep my employees on board so they can feed and send their children to school. Even if the PPP gave me a small loan, it kept us in business," he said.

"The good thing about my business is we're pretty small, so any business that comes our way helps us a lot in operations and finances. If things continue this way, I think we will be able to go through this pandemic," he added.

To date, the CNMI government is trying to get more federal loans and assistance. CNMI Washington Office director Jason Osborne said last week that more federal assistance may still flow into the CNMI while everyone awaits the U.S. Congress' negotiations about the second round of stimulus checks.

VOX POPULI

How do you keep up with finances during the pandemic?

By BEA CABRERA

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CORRESPONDENT

Whether you've been furloughed, laid off, or still has a job, money just seem to be hard to come by these days. The financial climate during the pandemic is making everyone feel is that they should spend less, save, and live modestly. For some people, that could be a drastic lifestyle change. Everyone has different ideas and strategies about the amount of money they should spend or not spend in their daily lives.

"At the start of the lockdown here on Saipan, I decided to stock up on a lot of food and stuff needed in the house because of fear that the containers would stop arriving. I remember spending at least \$200 a day for supplies and this went on for two weeks until I said I have stocked up enough. Overall, I remember spending \$1,000 in two weeks. In the long run, it was cheaper

It is already October and I am still finishing all the canned goods, rice, pasta, and dog food I bought in April

Chalan Kanoa

"Ever since I started working at 18, I have always kept an 'emergency fund' where I get 20% off of my pay, deposit that and never see that money again until, of course, I have an emergency. In April, I was furloughed and it was the first time I tapped into that emergency fund. It helped me pay my rent, utilities, food, gas until I got my job back in August. I would say I spent less and wisely when I was using my emergency fund. Now that I have work, I am replenishing my emergency fund again."

—David Cabrera, Dandan

"I got into gardening dur-

ing the pandemic. I didn't buy new plants, I just cut the ones in my mother's garden, re-rooted, and repotted them. As for pots, some pots can be expensive here on Saipan so, instead of spending money, I learned how to 'do it myself.' I used damaged mineral bottles—gallons and some small ones stocked in our backyard. Cut the top part, poked holes at the bottom and colored them and they are instant cute pots now."

—Cristina Attao, Capital Hill

"Food is my biggest expense pre-COVID-19. I live alone and get my food from take-outs. But now, I decided to skip take-out and do grocery shopping myself. I actually cannot believe that I can actually spend only \$15 on groceries and food that would last me for two days or six meals. I still eat out on special occasions but, by doing my grocery, I get to be mindful of what I put in my cart and how much its costs."

—Lyn Delgado, Garapan



"Our travel plans for Thanksgiving and Christmas were put off, so that is a huge savings for my family. Aside from that, my wife and I keep a monthly budget. We have cancelled some magazine subscription and just went online, which is way cheaper and happy to be surrounded by friends and a community that is giving. All of our 15-month-old baby clothes are all hand-me-downs."

—Pete Roberts, Dandan

"I work as a waitress. I used to work in just one restaurant but, when an opportunity opened for a waitressing job in another restaurant with

no conflict with my first work schedule, I grabbed it right away. Having an extra income never hurts."

—Emily Mendoza, Garapan

"I started selling things that we don't use—clothes, bags, and some kitchen equipment. We also do not turn on lights in any rooms that is not occupied at night; it saves us money on electricity bills. I cancelled my gym membership and just opted to do workouts that I get for free from YouTube. These are just little things but, all together, they can buy us groceries and pay other bills."

—Tina Chavez, Kagman

—Selina Magalang,



NMPASI

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With all the changes we all encountered this year, it is a good time to take our wellness into consideration as we enter into the new year. Wellness is a term thrown out often, but what does it really mean and what does it cover? According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration or SAMHSA, wellness is a “whole-person, strength-based approach to health.” SAMHSA focuses on eight dimensions of wellness that would be beneficial for improving a person's quality of life. They are **1) Emotional, 2) Environmental, 3) Financial, 4) Intellectual, 5) Occupational, 6) Physical, 7) Spiritual, and 8) Social.** By focusing on our individual strengths of the eight dimensions of wellness, we would be able to optimize our health and build resiliency when faced with traumatic events such as the COVID-19 Pandemic. Here are some ways we could optimize our health by balancing the eight dimensions of wellness.



- 1 Emotional wellness** deals with how we feel and how we cope with day to day stressors. To do that, we need to be able to check in with our relationship with ourselves and others. We need to be comfortable with taking time to ask ourselves how we are feeling and what can we do to improve our quality of life. Some ways to manage our emotional wellness may include listening to music, writing down our feelings, or meditating.
- 2 Environmental wellness** deals with how we feel and how we cope with day to day stressors. To do that, we need to be able to check in with our relationship with ourselves and others. We need to be comfortable with taking time to ask ourselves how we are feeling and what can we do to improve our quality of life. Some ways to manage our emotional wellness may include listening to music, writing down our feelings, or meditating.
- 3 Financial wellness** deals with how we manage our money. Being financially secure, especially during times of crisis, will help take away some of the worry because we would have the financial means to keep going. Some ways to manage our financial wellness may include having an emergency savings fund, limiting the amount of money we borrow, or by choosing to stay at home to cook instead of going out to eat.
- 4 Intellectual wellness** deals with our knowledge and skills. Honing on one specific skill set and choosing to learn everyday will help keep our minds active. Some ways to manage our intellectual health may include completing puzzles, reading, or talking with individuals who agree or disagree with our viewpoints.
- 5 Occupational wellness** deals with the satisfaction or enjoyment of the job you have or are doing. We spend a majority of our time at work so finding meaningful work and building workplace relationships is important to balance our overall wellness. Take time to eat lunch with coworkers, schedule family outings, and maintain meaningful communication throughout the week.
- 6 Physical wellness** deals with how much physical activity we do, how healthy we eat, and how much sleep we get. Exercising, eating a well-balanced diet, and getting enough quality sleep at night are simple ways to balance our physical wellness.
- 7 Spiritual wellness** deals with how much physical activity we do, how healthy we eat, and how much sleep we get. Exercising, eating a well-balanced diet, and getting enough quality sleep at night are simple ways to balance our physical wellness.
- 8 Social wellness** deals with our connection with others. Creating positive healthy relationships with others helps bring a sense of connection and support. Having a support system will make balancing the 8 dimensions of wellness easier to maintain.

When going down the list of the eight dimensions of wellness it is obvious that they are all interconnected because wellness is the holistic approach to our overall health. The pandemic surely has affected and left a majority of us to think constantly about the negative; but, with support and determination to live a better life, we must take the time to take care of ourselves. By interconnecting and balancing the eight different dimensions, we would be able to improve our quality of life that is focused on our strengths

Dawn Margaret Sarmiento Sablan
Projects Specialist

For resources on taking steps for overall wellness, visit samhsa.gov or contact NMPASI at (670) 235-7273/7274 or visit us online at www.nmpasi.org.

A Parent's Guide to Virtual Learning

In this time of pandemic, we are all facing challenges in receiving services, particularly students receiving special education services. While we all probably prefer face to face instruction, many parents in our community face additional anxiety surrounding the impact of this interruption of classroom learning time in this time of so much uncertainty.

The National Center for Learning disability came out with a great guide to help parents improve their child's experience with online learning. This guide highlighted four actions that parents need to take to help their child succeed in virtual learning:

1 There are research based best practices for children with disabilities who are engaged in online learning. Encourage your child's teacher to use them.

- **Face-to-face interactions are key.** It's important for children with disabilities to have virtual face-to-face interactions with their teachers. Using video will allow teachers to pick up verbal and physical cues and gauge your child's confidence and understanding during online instruction.
- **Measuring understanding needs to be ongoing.** Frequent surveys, online quizzes, chats, and other ways to check understanding will be particularly important when using distance learning.
- **Students need multiple ways to engage with curricula.** Online information needs to be represented in different formats, and students need options for engaging with and demonstrating their understanding. These are the hallmarks of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Encourage teachers to integrate UDL into their online instruction.

2 Your child may need help organizing time.

- Consider setting up specific spaces in the home where your child will engage in schoolwork. Create a calendar and clear expectations for work and play. Start with more rather than less structure, and make adjustments as your child establishes new routines.



3 Your child will need new ways to access needed services

- Look at your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan to identify the individuals providing your child's services. Connect with them to ask about compensatory services to support your child — their plans for the short, medium, and long term — and how you might help.

4 You and your child still have rights!

- COVID-19 did not erase your child's rights to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Schools and districts are working hard to identify how key processes that support education are going to be implemented until schools reopen their doors. These include having a way to hold IEP and 504 meetings virtually, and ensuring that your child is making progress in the core curriculum and receives needed accommodations to access information and demonstrate mastery of content.



You can access this guide for further details at <https://www.ncld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/A-Parents-Guide-to-Virtual-Learning-4-Actions-To-Improve-your-Childs-Experience-with-Online-Learning.pdf>

Elsie Tilipao
Projects Specialist

For more information on student rights to special education services, please call NMPASI at (670) 235-7273/4 or visit our website at www.nmpasi.org

'Spiritual wellness helps us think beyond ourselves'

By BEA CABRERA
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CORRESPONDENT

The pandemic has truly caused extraordinary disruption and anxiety throughout the world, which is why going back to what gives us hope, inspiration, and the will to go on is important more than ever. And the more we watch out for the wellbeing of others, the better all of us will be, according to Diocese of Chalan Kanoa Bishop Ryan Jimenez.

"...The specific challenges of the economy and the threat of disease that challenges all humanity makes us more aware of our common challenges and the more we have solidarity with all who suffer equally, the more we watch out for the wellbeing of others, and the better all of us will be. This is 'common sense' spirituality and propels all of us to think beyond ourselves, our families, and our customary communities because the pain of humanity makes us more united," he said.

"Many who are practicing their religion in

a conventional or nominal way can find real support in the heart of the spiritual mission of all religions because it is not about building churches and institutions now, it is about the reality of human suffering and solidarity which religion addresses with a heritage of faith, service, and a credible story of God who loves and teaches us that such love is our mission also," he added.

According to Jimenez, taking baby steps to raise one's spirituality makes a difference when disheartened and beaten by life challenges. "Oftentimes, people who are disheartened feel needy, are broken, and suffer from several failures in their communities. Often they live in a psychological world full of 'poor me.' This world can become a deep downward spiral if they turn to substances, or thought processes, or addictive behaviors as a relief, or as pain-killer, or as some kind of social identity which can be criticized as shameful," he said.

"The way through some of this is to not focus on the self and problems, but to be giving and loving as one is able. Small steps in becoming loving are important and can contribute to immense psychological healing and a little can go a long way," he added.



Jimenez

For counselling and comfort, Jimenez said that most professional-level workers in churches (clergy, elders, overseers) have some training in pastoral counseling for activating religious solutions to many human problems. "Moreover, they want to motivate the members to provide ordinary and compassionate love to the persons who are suffering in their midst. The stories of human suffering deserve attention and respect by all religious people, and the act of compassionate listening contains much power to heal and encourage," he said.

"Those who are Christians are called to be ready to listen, to love, and to support the broken persons in their lives and to regard such suffering persons as gifts from God, like true brothers and sisters," he added.

Jimenez said that building a strong spirituality requires strong relationships with other people and not just with God or the saints. "The more one can relate within the usual communities of life and break the boundaries toward loving the needy, the more complete the challenge of wellness becomes. Everyone can do this, even the most miserable of us. It does not mean we become social workers or join clubs or raise money (but it may include this for some). It just means we become more fully human ourselves by engaging and loving other people whom God himself puts into our lives and who need the love only we can give."

"This is not patronizing love, but a kind of special commitment to loving the unloved, serving the ungrateful, accommodating the

strange, and being consistently positive with the angry, prejudiced, and hateful. We are designed by God for this, and Christians tell the story of God's son who made this characteristic obvious to his followers," he added.

To find encouragement and purpose in life, you have to listen to yourself, Jimenez said. "If you know the right thing to do, do it. Sometimes it is awkward to seek forgiveness, to offer forgiveness, to give of self, to be loving. We don't have to push, but we can do the right thing, which is always a loving thing. Doing the right things reshapes our lives, our time, our energies, our resources, and our relationships as it brings us closer to God and allows us to work with him in His mission," he said.

"...The most important challenges in life are not just temporary. They are always the same issues...pride, prejudices, malice, shame, and all the things associated with the 'seven deadly sins.' The forms differ a lot but the fundamental challenges to reform our lives with the help of God and our communities—this is the stuff of life. When we work out our guilt in some of these matters, the temporary challenges of life become far more manageable," he added.

During this pandemic, Jimenez said that love renders us healthy and love gives us the foundation and stability that sustains. "Love is the endowment of every human being (we can do it), and any church serves to strengthen its members to undertake the great effort of love," he said. "...That is our job, really—to minimize the damage and...to replace some of it with authentic humanity. I believe firmly that God does this in every human being, and that churches are supposed to assist with God's mission."

'Read, read, read for intellectual wellness'

By BEA CABRERA
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CORRESPONDENT

If you ask when is a good time to read, Saipan Book Club members will tell you that anytime is a good time.

According to Lindsay Nash, who heads the Saipan Book Club, it's a very casual club where women from all backgrounds and ages come together once a month to talk about the book that they had just read.

"We take turns choosing a new book each month, and whoever chooses the book is the host of the next meeting. The host leads the discussion and comes prepared with questions and topics to discuss and we usually have drinks and snacks—and once even an entire Peruvian dinner when we were reading a novel by a South American writer and it is always a good time," she said.

The club is a good reminder that life may have turned fast and busy that we've simply forgotten about old hobbies like reading and the pandemic has essentially revived some of these long-forgotten habits.

Nash said that in a time when we can barely leave the island, isn't it nice to explore other places simply by opening a book? "Books are a uniquely portable magic,"

says Stephen King. And isn't that true? Books transport us to different worlds. ...The pandemic has been hard for everyone. I have found that it can be very tempting to shut down my brain and simply scroll through social media and the news. But this can be so toxic for our mental health. Reading a book, however, gives our brains a break from our own stress and transports us to a different world and a different story."

Nash says that her love for reading and writing has continued into adulthood. She has loved to read since she was a girl and "I remember being on the playground in Kindergarten and telling a friend that I could now read a book as difficult as Dr. Seuss! And, in second grade, I started dreaming about

writing books. I wrote short stories and illustrated them for my teacher, Ms. Fitzgerald, who always encouraged my love of reading and writing," she added.

The Saipan Book Club currently has 51 members in its Facebook group but the meetings are usually much smaller—around 10 people. "Because there are so many people interested, we have the general rule that you should read the book if you're going to attend and that helps keep the numbers manageable. ...The club met virtually several times during the pandemic, via Zoom, but as we've moved into a safer community status, we've recently started meeting in person again," she added.

One SBC member, Beylul Solomon, has been a mem-



"The Saipan Book Club is a very casual club where women from all backgrounds and ages come together to discuss topics related to the book that they just read," said SBC head Lindsay Nash.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO



The Saipan Book Club at one of its recent meetings.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

ber since a year and a half ago and loves the dynamics when members talk about a book. "It allows you to see the different perspectives and interpretations of the same work. It also gives people the opportunity to share personal stories that relate to the book and brings people closer. ...I wouldn't say that reading makes us forget about the stresses and challenges that the pandemic brings but I certainly feel like it gives you a momentary break to get together with your girlfriends," she said.

"It's very important to stay active mentally and physically because it has many protective factors for positive health outcomes when people are socially isolated and or experiencing stress. Reading a book allows you to travel in your mind to places

you've never been and can be a great way of temporarily alleviating some of those stresses associated with a pandemic," she added.

Another member, Mili Chaves De Saiki, said that being in a book club is a great way to process the content of any book. "It is amazing how different and, the same time, alike we feel about a book."

Saiki likes the book club for two main reasons: One, you must read a book with a final date to finish it, so no procrastination is allowed. And two, you have a great reason or excuse to get together with friends that you do not see often. "Touching base with current events, etc. and, of course, we all need distraction, especially now with all pandemic and political situation," she said.

According to Nash, read-

ing books makes her humble. "The more I read, the more I know that I don't know anything at all. Reading makes us smarter, more thoughtful, more empathetic and more aware of the world around us. ...I'm currently reading *The Overstory* by Richard Powers and it's an incredible environmental saga that looks at the human story through tree years, meaning every minor thing that happens to the characters is just that—so minute in terms of the whole picture," she said. "It really puts in perspective our place in the world as humans. We are so small in the scheme of things. But, at the same time, it's up to us to preserve our environment for the future. It's a powerful reminder of just how small we are, and how, this too [pandemic] shall pass," she added.

You Are Not Alone.

That is what we want all victims and survivors to know. Even though we are living through even more challenging times, we at the Northern Marianas Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence with our hard-working advocates and first responders are here dedicated to keeping services available to help victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in the CNMI.

If you or someone you know is experiencing violence or abuse, please reach out and call:

In case of emergencies - 911

Karidat Social Services' 24/7 Victim Hotline - (670) 234-5100

The Victim Hotline is available 24/7 to offer confidential one-on-one support, crisis intervention, and referral to anyone in the CNMI. Whether you have a question about safety planning or just need someone to talk to, you can call the Victim Hotline at any time.

Karidat Social Services - (670) 234-6981

Besides running the only 24/7 Victim Hotline in the CNMI, Karidat Social Services also provides a number of different services for victims and survivors including crisis counseling, case management, referral, moral support and assistance with the filing of temporary restraining order. They also run Guma' Esperansa, a shelter for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. Their services also extend to the community in the form of temporary assistance for families/individuals who need assistance in terms of food and rental assistance with funding from donations and the National Emergency Food and Shelter Grant. For more information, visit www.karidat.com.

CNMI Office of the Attorney General - (670) 237-7600

The advocates at the CNMI Office of the Attorney General's Victim Witness Advocacy Unit are well-versed in CNMI law and provide case management for victims and survivors. Advocates are also available to answer questions on different topics including the process of filing temporary restraining orders.

CNMI Family Court - (670) 783-7825

The CNMI Family Court also provides assistance with filing temporary restraining orders, as well as assistance with pro-se filing at Family Court which include cases involving divorce, guardianship, adoption, and change of name.

DCCA Division of Youth Services - (670) 287-1773, (670) 285-2780 or (670) 285-2781

The Department of Community and Cultural Affairs - Division of Youth Services provides a wide range of services including handling and investigating reports of child abuse and neglect, assisting youth and families experiencing homelessness, providing emergency shelter and foster care, as well community outreach to help strengthen healthy families. For more information, visit www.dys.gov.mp.

Northern Marianas Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence - (670) 234-3878

Since its incorporation in 2007, NMCASDV works "to promote, nourish, and sustain a collective movement to end violence in the CNMI." While NMCASDV does not provide direct services, this nonprofit serves victims and survivors by working to educate the community on the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault, providing training to service providers and responders, nurturing meaningful partnerships with groups or individuals, as well as working to create social change. For more information, email info@endviolencenmi.org or follow NMCASDV on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (@endviolencenmi).

We are here for you. You are not alone.



**Northern Marianas Coalition
Against Domestic and Sexual Violence**

For more information, call NMCASDV at 234-3878
or email info@endviolencenmi.org

   **@EndViolenceNMI**

This project is supported by Grant No. 2001MPSDVC awarded by Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services.
The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services.

INVEST IN YOURSELF FOR A HEALTHIER & HAPPIER YOU

